

A REVIEW

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OF

REV. DOCTOR LORD'S SERMON

ON

THE HIGHER LAW,

IN ITS APPLICATION TO

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE BILL.

BY REV. WILLIAM C. WISNER.

READ, PONDER, DECIDE: FOR "AS A MAN THINKETH SO IS HE;" THAT IS,
A MAN IS NO BETTER THAN HIS PRINCIPLES.

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TO THE READER.

THE following Review is given to the public at the solicitation of a few ministerial brethren, in whom the author has the utmost confidence.. It was undertaken with no love for the spirit of controversy, but with an earnest desire to subserve the cause of truth. All we ask for it, is a careful and candid perusal. The reader is under no obligation to adopt our views on this or any other subject, any farther than they correspond with the revealed Will of God.

REVIEW.

THE present is a time of great interest to every American citizen. It is a time when subjects of the greatest importance to our wide-spread and growing Republic are being re-investigated and discussed, with reference to their bearing upon the welfare of the nation, and their relation to that system of ethics which has its foundation in the word of God.

The most exciting, and, we may add, at present the most important of these subjects is that of American slavery. The fact that a system of slavery, involving the chattel principle, is interwoven with the very texture of our political constitution, that, with all its horrors, it is legalized and exists to a large extent in the midst of a nation who pride themselves upon their attachment to liberty and the doctrine of equal rights, has been considered by a large portion of our citizens, a *burning shame*, and has also been our *reproach* among the civilized nations of the earth.

For a long period, we were denied the right of discussing the subject in our halls of legislation, and respectful

petitions, signed by thousands of citizens, praying our rulers to consider it and adopt the wisest and best means for the final removal of the evil, were without ceremony laid on the table, as unworthy the serious attention of so grave and dignified a body as the American Congress. But, for the last two years, this subject has claimed the attention of the people and their representatives in every part of the land. That it should produce great and general excitement, was to be expected. But that this excitement will in the end prove disastrous to the country or to the slave, we do not believe. Much has been written on both sides which is to be regretted; but surely not more than might have been anticipated, when we consider the circumstances and heat of the discussion.

It has, however, developed one fact for which the author of these pages was not prepared, and which has surprised not merely himself, but many of his brethren. It is the fact that so many northern ministers are prepared to become the apologists of slavery, and have endeavored, in every possible way, to torture the Bible into their service.

We were not surprised at the appointment, by a certain class of politicians assembled at Castle garden, of a *Union Safety Committee*, whose ostensible business it is to see that the *Union be not dissolved*, but who are in fact engaged in catering to the worst passions of Southern politicians, and doing what they can to perpetuate the "peculiar institution" of slavery. But we were surprised to find them becoming a *sermon publishing Committee*,—making the press and the post-office department groan under the weight of productions from eminent northern divines,—

and, as if they begrudged the revenue accruing from the postage on these productions, getting them franked by various members of Congress, and sending them by thousands, free of charge, to every part of the country.

One of these franked sermons is now on our table; and as they all bear a marked resemblance to each other, showing that they belong to the same family, perhaps we cannot better express our views upon the general positions they assume, than by a candid and careful review of the one before us. It is a sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Lord, of Buffalo, to the people of his charge, on our last Thanksgiving day. The title of the discourse is well chosen to represent its contents. It is entitled, "*The Higher Law in its Application to the Fugitive Slave Bill.*" Its object is to show that, upon the subject of slavery, there is no higher law than human constitutions, and that the decisions of government, upon this subject at least—no matter how oppressive and unrighteous—are, and ought to be, final, and should be submitted to and carried out by the citizen.

The passage of Scripture selected, from which to deduce such a doctrine, appears to us peculiarly unfortunate. It is Matt. 22: 17–21. The history of this passage is familiar to every reader of the Bible. After a consultation of the Pharisees how they might entangle Christ in his talk, they sent unto him certain of their disciples, with the Herodians, to ask him whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar? This question was wisely selected to lead him into difficulty. An answer either way, was fraught with danger. Should he answer in the affirmative, he would be in danger from his own countrymen, who, at that time,

were the conquered vassals of the Roman Empire, and hated, with a perfect hatred, the Roman tribute. Should he answer in the negative, he would be in danger of being arraigned at Cæsar's judgment bar, for promulgating seditious and treasonable doctrines. Being guided by wisdom from on high, he was at no loss how to extricate himself from this difficulty. Instead of giving a direct answer, he asked to see the tribute money. They brought him a penny. He inquired, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." This was in no proper or strict sense an answer to the question proposed, but a most wise and judicious evasion of it. Christ, by this answer, did not say that it was right to pay tribute to Cæsar. The Pharisees did not so understand him—if they had, it was all they wanted. Nor did he deny the right to pay tribute—if he had, that was all they desired. He answered them, by stating the general principle, that they should render to all their dues—to Cæsar what belonged to him, and to God what belonged to him. Nor does this answer distinguish between what belongs to Cæsar and what to God. If it does, the line of distinction must be, that whatever bears the image of Cæsar belongs to him, and whatever bears the image of God belongs to him—and surely this line would subvert entirely the doctrine of the discourse we are considering. Suppose the inquiry had been, "Master, is it right for men to hold their fellow men in bondage? Is slavery right?" He replies, "show me a slave." They bring him one. He then asks, "Whose is this image and

superscription?" What answer must they give? Could they say that it was Cæsar's? Would they not be compelled to admit that it was God's? Is not the slave a man? And does he not belong to that race who were created in the *image of God*? If so, he might reply: "Render therefore unto God the things that are God's, and unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. Slaves bear the image of God. They belong to him and not to the government. And government have no right to strip them of their humanity, and, by *chattelizing them*, to place them among brutes."

But we will pass from the text to consider the sentiments maintained in the sermon itself. We are told in the introduction, that "it does not require very great discernment to see, that the continued agitation of the vexed question of slavery, must, in the end, sever the bonds between the free and the slave states, or render them not worth preserving." And has it come to this, that we of the North must hold our tongues and lay aside our pens on the subject of slavery, or the union will be dissolved? We have heard such threats from Southern politicians until we have ceased to be alarmed. Nor do we believe that our fears will be very much stirred by their *repetition* by a certain class of northern divines. The subject of slavery, like other great subjects, should be discussed in a dignified, manly, calm and unheated manner; but that it will continue to be discussed until it is thoroughly sifted—and, if possible, *sifted* from the *Republic*—we have no doubt.

There is another sentiment contained in our author's introduction, to which we would invite special attention —

it may be of service in the after review. "The acknowledged principle," he says, "that the law of God is *supreme*, and when in direct conflict with any *mere human enactment*, renders it *nugatory*, has been used to justify an abandonment of the compromises of the constitution." While we do not wish to use this "*acknowledged principle*" for any such purpose, we are gratified to see it so plainly stated, for we think we can find a far better and more important end for which it may be used. Here is a distinct admission that the law of God is *supreme*—that it is *above all human enactments*, and that when human enactments come in *conflict with it*, it renders them *nugatory*. Here, then, we have found a law *somewhat higher* than the constitution, unless our author is prepared to take the ground that our federal constitution is *not a mere human enactment*. The federal constitution is a higher law than the constitutions of the several states. And why a higher law? Because it renders *nugatory* any provisions of these constitutions which conflict with its provisions. And upon the same principle, according to our author's own showing, the law of God is a *higher law* than the federal constitution, or any enactment of Congress.

Let us place this admission by the side of the main and leading position of the sermon, and see to what conclusion it will inevitably lead. "We take the ground," says our author, "that the action of civil governments, within their *appropriate jurisdiction*, is *final* and *conclusive* upon the citizen; and that to plead a higher law to justify disobedience to a human law, the subject matter of which is *within the cognizance* of the state, is to *reject the authority of God himself*;" that is, the citizen is bound

most scrupulously to obey every enactment of government, no matter how *unrighteous* and *oppressive*, provided, *only*, it is upon a subject upon which government has a *right to act at all*. This is a most sweeping assertion. It admits of but one exception, and that is, where the subject of the action is not within the "appropriate jurisdiction" of the government. The only plea, then, which a tender conscience has a right to put in, against the action of any human government is, a *want of jurisdiction*. It is not allowed to plead that the government has acted wrong in a matter where it has any right to act at all. The only plea that can be made in justification for not obeying a law, is, that it is upon a subject over which the government has no jurisdiction, and, consequently, no right to act in any manner.

The position previously taken is, that it is an "*acknowledged principle* that the law of God is *supreme*, and, when in direct conflict with any mere human law, renders it *nugatory*." What is the meaning of "*nugatory*?" If it means any thing in this place, it must mean that, under such circumstances, the law has *no binding force*. Upon whom has it no binding force? Evidently upon those on whom it would have had a binding force had it not come in conflict with the *supreme* law of God, and all such must be the citizens, or subjects, of the government by whom the law is enacted. The doctrine here taught is, that a mere human enactment may so conflict with the supreme law of God as to be rendered *nugatory*, and thus lose its binding force upon the citizen. But we are taught by the after and main position, that no mere human enactment can be rendered *nugatory* by the supreme law

of God, so as not to be final and binding upon the citizen, *unless it be upon a subject where government has no right to legislate*. We do not pretend that these positions contradict each other; but, taken together, they reduce the matter to a single point, viz: that governments, in all cases where they have *any* authority, have *supreme* authority, *notwithstanding the law of God*. Now this must arise from one of two causes: either God has *no authority whatever* in matters belonging to government, or the authority of government is *superior* to that of God. But if God has no authority in matters belonging to government, either it is true that he never had any such authority, or it is true that, at some time, he has relinquished this authority in favor of the governments of the earth. Nor are we left in the dark as to which of these positions is assumed by our learned author. He says distinctly, that, "to plead a higher law to justify disobedience to a human law, the subject matter of which is within the cognizance of the state, is to *reject the authority of God himself*." What is this but saying that God, in all such matters, has relinquished his jurisdiction to the state, so that, in regard to them, there is no appeal from its decisions to himself; and that the citizen who dares to attempt such an appeal, is *guilty* of rejecting the authority and appointment of God? We should like to have our author inform us when God made such a relinquishment in favor of the governments of the earth? when he gave them supreme jurisdiction in all matters within their cognizance, so that there is no appeal from their decisions to himself? We trust that he will not shrink from a legitimate consequence of this doctrine, viz:

that governments, within the sphere of their action, *can do no wrong*. The catechism of his church teaches that *sin is the transgression of the law of God*; and if God, in all matters belonging to government, has relinquished his authority, so that, by his appointment, the decisions of government, in all such matters, are *supreme, final*—under *all* circumstances *binding*; then, surely, government *can do no wrong*, unless it attempts to meddle with what does not concern it. In England the doctrine that the king can do no wrong is held to be a fiction in law; but, it seems, that in America, among a certain class of divines, this doctrine has become a *stern reality*. They have come to agree, with a single exception, with the infidel Hobbes on the foundation of right and wrong. He held that the *civil law was its sole foundation—that whatever government decided to be right, was right, and whatever it decided to be wrong, was wrong*. The only difference between Hobbes and these divines, on this point, is, that while he makes the position universal, they limit it to those things which come legitimately under the cognizance of government.

But perhaps it will be said, that we have misunderstood our author—that what he means is, to place government between God and the subject, so that while governments are subject to God, and held responsible by him for their wrong decisions—decisions which come in *conflict* with his *supreme* law—the subject is *not* held responsible for obeying and carrying out these decisions; yea, he is under obligation to obey them. And can it be possible, that our author intends to teach that the subject is under obligation to obey human laws which are *in conflict with the Divine*

law ?—that while governments will be called to an account for enacting such laws, the subject is not only innocent, but in the discharge of a most solemn duty when he yields obedience to them? If so, what becomes of his “acknowledged principle that the law of God is supreme, and when in direct conflict with any mere human enactment renders it nugatory?” In what sense is it *nugatory*, if, while it is in conflict with the Divine law, the citizen is under obligation to obey it?

That we have not mistaken the views of our author upon this point, will further appear from the following quotations:—“The decisions of government upon matters within their jurisdiction, though they may be erroneous, are yet, from the necessity of the case, *absolute*.” “But the position we have taken, that the decisions of government are *final* in cases where they have jurisdiction, even when mistaken or oppressive,” &c. “But in regard to the question of a *higher law*, which we think we have demonstrated, cannot be urged to annul the legislation of a state, in relation to any matter properly within its jurisdiction, it may be further replied, that it is not yet proved that the enactment or recognition of slavery is within the powers divinely delegated to governments—that it is against the supreme law, and therefore all human legislation is inoperative and void.” It seems to us that there can be no mistake in regard to the teaching of these paragraphs. They certainly teach that the decisions of government in all matters where it has *any* authority, are *final* and *binding* upon the citizen,—that in all such matters there is no appeal to a *higher law*; and that the only way in which the decisions of government can come in conflict with the

Divine law, and thus be rendered “inoperative and void,” is *by being upon subjects which are not properly within its jurisdiction*. It will be seen, also, by the last paragraph, that our author holds that both “the *enactment*” and “recognition of slavery” are properly within the jurisdiction government,—that it has a right, not only to recognize and regulate slavery where it exists, but also to *enact it into existence* where it does not; and that this right is *absolute, entirely independent of a higher law*. Here, then, we have one of the things which belong *exclusively* to government, and over which God has *relinquished all control*.

But let us inquire more at large what are the things which God has relinquished to government, and what the things which he has retained to himself? This inquiry becomes one of vast importance. We surely ought to know what limit God has set to his own authority; and in what particulars the decisions of human governments are *final, absolute, supreme*, not subject to the *Divine law*. We are gratified to be able to answer this inquiry in the very words of our author: “Governments have jurisdiction over men in all affairs which belong peculiarly to the present life,—in all the temporal relations which bind societies, communities, and families together, in respect to all rights of persons and property, and their enforcement by penalties.” Here, then, are the things which belong to the governments of the earth, and over which their authority is supreme, and their enactments subject to no higher law.

The things which belong to God, and over which He has retained authority, are stated as follows:—“In regard to

his own worship, and the manner in which we are to approach him, the Supreme Governor has given full and minute directions. He has revealed Himself, his attributes, and the great principles of his government, which constitute the doctrines of Christianity; and has conferred upon no human authority the right to interfere, by adding to or taking from them. **IN THE THINGS THAT BELONG TO HIMSELF**, God exercises *sole* and absolute jurisdiction, and has, in regard to them, appointed *no inferior or delegated authority*." Here are some pretty broad statements which it may not be amiss to examine with a degree of minuteness. We are told that "governments have jurisdiction over men *in all affairs* which belong *peculiarly to the present life*." What does our author mean by "*affairs which belong peculiarly to the present life*?" Does he mean affairs which terminate with this life? If so, he would give to government the ordinances of religion, such as a preached Gospel, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, &c. Surely this cannot be his meaning. Does he mean affairs, the influence of which terminates with this life, and which have no bearing upon the life to come? We think he would have great difficulty to find any such affairs; and we must conclude that this is not his meaning. Does he mean affairs which are not peculiarly religious, and which were instituted more especially for the convenience and happiness of man here, than with reference to a preparation for eternity? This would seem to be his meaning, and it is the more evident when taken in connection with what immediately follows: "in all *temporal* relations which bind societies, communities, and families together, in respect to all rights of person and property." Here "tem-

poral relations" seem to be used as opposed to *spiritual relations*, by which we suppose our author intends relations which belong peculiarly to the Christian Church, and have especially to do with the Christian religion. And this is still further evident when we consider what things he defines as belonging to God. He limits these to "His own worship, and the manner in which we are to approach Him,"—to "the great principles of His government which constitute the doctrines of Christianity." Now if he means any thing by this distinction and limitation, he must mean that all matters which relate *peculiarly* to the church and religion belong to God, and *all other matters* to government.

To secure greater distinctness we will place in opposite columns the things which belong to God, and those which belong to government.

Things which belong to God.

"His own worship and the manner in which we are to approach Him."
 "The great principles of His government which constitute the doctrines of Christianity."

Things which belong to Government.

"All affairs which belong peculiarly to the present life. All the temporal relations which bind societies, communities, and families together: all rights of person, and of property, and their enforcement by penalties."

Surely God has been very benevolent, and has relinquished to human governments *much the largest half* of His authority.

It should be recollected that in all matters belonging to government, its decisions are final and binding upon the citizen, and there is no appeal to a *higher law*. The sole and supreme authority in all these matters, rests with the government. Its decisions, let them be what they may, cannot be rendered *nugatory* by the *Divine law*. God has relinquished all his jurisdiction in these matters to government; and what remains for the citizen is *implicit obedi-*

ence ; for “*to plead a higher law to justify disobedience to a human law, the subject matter of which is within the cognizance of the state, is to reject the authority of God himself.*” Why is it “to reject the authority of God himself?” Evidently because God has relinquished all jurisdiction in such matters to human governments, and requires implicit obedience on the part of the subject. And as God has nothing to do with matters belonging to government, so government has nothing to do with matters belonging to God — they are *entirely independent of each other*. That is, God has placed himself right where the Italians have been endeavoring to place the Pope,—he has relinquished all civil authority, and is contenting himself with *mere ecclesiastical rule*. Surely “Jacobins, Fourierites, Communists, and Levelers of all sorts,” have never embraced or published a doctrine more alarming than this.

Our author even goes so far as to inform us that upon those subjects which belong to him, God has never delegated any authority to man. His language is so direct and explicit that evasion is impossible. He says, and places the sentiment in glaring capitals, that “**IN THE THINGS THAT BELONG TO HIMSELF, GOD EXERCISES SOLE AND ABSOLUTE JURISDICTION, AND HAS IN REGARD TO THEM, APPOINTED NO INFERIOR OR DELEGATED AUTHORITY.***”

*Should our author contend that he means *legislative* jurisdiction and authority, we reply, 1st. He does not say so. He says, “*sole and absolute jurisdiction,*” not *legislative* jurisdiction. He says, “*no inferior or delegated authority,*” not *legislative authority*—and surely a doctor of divinity ought to know *how to say what he means*, and not say one thing and mean another. 2d. Had he said, *legislative* jurisdiction and authority, it is *untrue*. God claims at least some rights in the Sabbath, and in the subjects of murder and theft ; He has taken the

We would ask our author, whether the parent has any authority over his child in matters of religion? If so, from whence does he derive this authority? Certainly not from the government, for such matters do not belong to it; and as certainly not from God, for in matters belonging to him he delegates no authority. We would ask again, whether the Sessions, Presbyteries, and General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church have any authority? If so, from whence have they derived this authority? Not from the state, for it has no authority in such matters; not from God, for in matters belonging to him he delegates no authority. From whence comes our author's authority as a minister of the gospel and the pastor of his people? By his own showing it can come neither from the state, nor from God. From whence, then, has he derived it?

We would also inquire of our author whether the Sabbath belongs to God, or to government? If to the former, the government has nothing whatever to do with it; it has not even the right to enact laws to enforce its sanctity. If to the latter, then government may pass laws requiring its violation; and as such laws are *final*, the citizen is *bound to obey*.

Marriage, according to our author, belongs to government and not to God, for surely it is one of those "temporal relations which bind families together"—and if so,

liberty to legislate upon them amid the awful solemnities of Sinai—and yet no sensible man will deny that human governments have the right to legislate upon the same subjects, but they must take care that their legislation does not conflict with the legislation of God.

The position of our author, in any aspect, is false as the Koran, and if adopted by the ministers of the gospel, would make more infidels than the united influence of "levelers of all sorts."

government has a right to abrogate it, and to legalize universal concubinage—and its decisions will be *final*, and *imperious* upon the citizen, there is no appeal to a *higher law*. So government might enact that every man should have two wives; and even here there is *no appeal*—the subject is *bound to obey*. But perhaps our author will take the ground that marriage is a spiritual relation and belongs to God. It will then follow that governments have no right to meddle with it—they have no right to enforce or to regulate it. And it becomes a grave question whether any man, or class of men has the right or authority to solemnize marriage,—for it belongs to God, and in all matters belonging to Him He *delegates no authority*.

To whom do those rights, the violation of which is denominated *theft* and *murder*, belong? to God, or to government? If to God, then government has nothing to do with them. If to government, then God has nothing to do with them. And if government should think proper to legalize theft, and murder, its decisions upon these subjects would be *final*,—there would be no appeal to a *higher law*. Should our author take the ground that the protection of human life belongs to God, and not to government, and should he cite in support of this opinion the fact that God has fixed the death penalty to murder, with which penalty human governments have no right to interfere, we would then ask, who has authority to execute this penalty upon the offender? Not the government;—for in things belonging to God it has no jurisdiction. Not any man or angel delegated by God for that purpose,—for “IN THE THINGS BELONGING TO HIMSELF GOD EXER-

CISES SOLE AND ABSOLUTE JURISDICTION, AND HAS, IN REGARD TO THEM, APPOINTED NO INFERIOR OR DELEGATED AUTHORITY."

We do not see but that we must wait for God to execute this penalty in person: and we have a reasonable assurance that if we wait long enough, he will do it; for in all probability, at some point in the future, the murderer will die.

Our author feels bound to admit that revolution is a *civil* right. "The right of revolution," he says, "is a civil right, which can be properly exercised *only by a decided majority, under circumstances of aggravated oppression, and upon a reasonable assurance of success.*" Here the civil right of revolution under certain circumstances is admitted. But from whence comes this right? Not from God; for *civil rights* do not belong to him. Not from the government; for it would be absurd to suppose the government to confer upon the citizen a right to *subvert itself*.

But let us view this subject of revolution in the light of our author's interpretation of Romans xiii: 1 and 2. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God." We are told that this passage teaches that in all matters within their cognizance "the powers that be" are supreme,—and to resist them, let their course be ever so erroneous and oppressive, is to resist the *ordinance of God*. If this be true, on what does our author predicate the right of civil revolution? Such a revolution is certainly resistance to "the powers that

be," and if to resist them under any such circumstances is to resist the *ordinance* of God, yea, even "*to reject the authority of God himself*," on what does he predicate this right? Does he predicate it on the fact that the government has been guilty of "aggravated oppression?" Surely this can form no just cause for resistance, for we are taught by him, that in all matters over which government has jurisdiction, its decisions are final, and subject to no HIGHER LAW. Does he predicate it on the fact that a decided majority are in its favor? Then it follows that while minorities are forbidden to resist the ordinance of God, "decided majorities," may resist it, and the sin consists not in the act, but in the want of numbers on the part of those engaged in it. Does he predicate it on the fact that there is "*a reasonable assurance of success*?" It follows then that while it is unlawful to resist the ordinance of God, without "*a reasonable assurance of success*," with such assurance resistance is entirely lawful, and the sin consists, not in committing the act, but in committing it without "*a reasonable assurance of success*." We have often heard it said, that "assurance is every thing," but after all, we did not think it was quite as much, as this makes it to be. Is it not evident that the passage under consideration, has been misconceived, and misapplied by our author, and that it was never intended to teach, so absurd and untenable a doctrine as he has endeavored to sustain by it? But here the inquiry arises, if our author has mistaken the import of this passage, what does it mean? This and similar passages teach something, and what do they teach? They declare government to be in some sense an ordinance of God, and enjoin subjection, and obe-

dience to it. In what sense is government an ordinance of God, and how far are we bound to obey its requirements? These questions, we shall endeavor to answer, and if we fail to satisfy the reader, we have the consolation, that there is a "higher law" than our opinion, and that he is under no obligation to adopt it as his own.

That the reader may have them distinctly before his mind, we will here insert the two principal passages upon this subject. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God : the powers that be, are ordained (ordered) of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God : and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power ? Do that which is good and thou shalt have praise of the same : For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid ; for he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath, upon him that doeth evil. Whereupon we must needs be subject, not only for wrath (for fear of the penalty,) but also for conscience sake." Rom. XIII: 1-5. "Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the King, as supreme ; or unto Governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well." 1. Peter II: 13, 14. In the first passage, upon the sentence "The powers that be are ordained (ordered) of God," the learned Bloomfield remarks, "By this it is only meant, that they are permitted to hold the office they hold, by the disposing Providence of God ; though mediately appointed,

by the authority, and invested with it, by the consent of man."

It is worthy of notice, that while Paul calls "the powers that be," or the then existing government, an ORDINANCE OF GOD, Peter calls it an ORDINANCE OF MAN. Nor are these statements contradictory. They were made of different aspects of the same thing. It is true of an existing government, that in one sense it is an ordinance of God, and in another sense an ordinance of man. For as Bishop Sanderson very justly observes, "the *substance* of the power of every magistrate is the *ordinance of God* ; but the *specification* of the *circumstances thereto belonging*, as in regard of places, persons, titles, continuance, jurisdiction, subordination, and the rest, is a *human ordinance introduced by custom or positive law*."

In the sentence of Paul "Whosoever resisteth the power," &c., the word rendered "resisteth" is *antitassomenos*. It is used but five times in the New Testament, viz. in Acts 18 : 6, "And when they *opposed themselves*, and blasphemed ;" in James 4 : 6, "Resist the Devil and he will flee from thee ;" in James 5 : 6, "Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not *resist* you ;" in 1 Peter 5 : 5, "For God *resisteth* the proud," &c., and in the passage now under consideration. It will at once be perceived that in every instance, it implies *determined* and *active* hostility. Prof. Robinson renders it "to array oneself against." Bloomfield translates this sentence, "He who sets himself in array against." Every Greek scholar knows that this word has a far more active signification than can possibly be implied in merely omitting to obey the precept of the law, and as a consequence, submitting to suffer the penalty. It would seem then that the submission enjoined in this

passage, is, that which is opposed to *arraying one's self against* the Government. It does not necessarily imply obedience to law in every supposable case. But in every case it does imply obedience, or a peaceable submission to suffer the penalty. They to whom the Apostle wrote, were to yield implicit obedience, when they conscientiously could; and in those cases where the human law conflicted with the law of God, so that, with them, obedience was morally impossible, they were to submit to suffer the penalty. This subjection the Apostle would have them render not mainly through fear of the penalty, but "for conscience sake." And surely it could not be for *conscience sake*, if the subjection required included obedience to a law which conflicted with the Divine law, and thus did violence to an enlightened and tender conscience.

There was great need that the early converts to christianity should be instructed and exhorted on the duty of subjection to rulers : for the spirit of sedition, against their Roman conquerors, was deeply seated in the hearts of the Jews, and the Gentile converts were in danger of feeling that they were under no obligation to be in subjection to heathen magistrates. The Apostles, to guard them against sedition and misrule, enjoined submission to "the powers that be," as to an ordinance or appointment of God. They taught that Government was ordained for the good of the people, and that the magistracy was appointed for the punishment of evil doers, and "for the praise of them that do well." For, says Paul, "Rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power ? Do that which is good and thou shalt have praise of the same : For he is the minister of God to thee for

good. But if thou do that which is evil be afraid ; for he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." This is a graphic description of the end or design of all government, and of what rulers are ordained or appointed to be. But when they pervert the ends of justice, and enact wicked laws, which ought not to be obeyed, the subject, up to the time when a revolution becomes expedient or necessary, must submit to suffer the penalty.

Government, when viewed separate from its forms, is of universal obligation. Its necessity is founded in the nature of things. It is so ordained of God that society cannot exist without it. Society can no more do without government, than the individual can do without food. But it should always be borne in mind that government is ordained for the people, and not the people for government. As a man eats to live, instead of living to eat, so the people are governed that they may exist, instead of existing to be governed.

God has so far ordained a form to government, that the last cannot exist without the first. It is as impossible for government to exist without a form, as it is for society to exist without government. But God has never so ordained the form of government, as to make any *particular* form binding upon the nations of the earth. We do not believe in the *Divine* right of either kings or republics. God has left the particular form of government to the choice of the people, and the circumstances of each individual case. He has given to tribes and nations, the civil right to choose their own form of government, and to change that form, whenever, in their opinion, there exist good and sufficient

reasons for so doing. But it should be kept in mind, that this right does not belong to the individual, nor to minorities, but to the body politic—to the great mass which constitute the people at large, and that it should never be exercised, unless there is a reasonable prospect of success, nor unless there is a prospect that to succeed will not cost more blood and treasure, than the change is worth. While we believe that aggravated oppression is a sufficient and perhaps the very best reason for revolutions, we also hold that there are other good reasons. It is left for the people themselves to decide when such reasons exist, and then they may lawfully revolutionize or change their form of government. Should the English nation almost unanimously conclude that to change their form of government to a republic, would vastly promote their happiness and prosperity, and should the change be opposed only by a few individuals in power, would they not have a right to effect such a change? Should the British Provinces on this continent conclude that it would be greatly to their advantage to separate from the Mother Country, and establish a government of their own, and that this result could be secured at comparatively a small cost, would they not have a right to attempt the change?

But, under a government where no reason exists for such a change, this doctrine of revolution has no practical bearing upon the citizen. In such circumstances, the government is to enact the laws and execute them. And the duty of the citizen is implicit subjection. The ordained rulers, are God's ministers to promote righteousness, and to seek the good of the people. If they abuse their high position, and use it for sinister purposes, they must answer

to Jehovah himself. They are supposed to have a judgment and conscience of their own, and are bound to enact such laws as are in conformity to the law of God, and will promote the best interests of the nation. They are not bound by the judgment and conscience of the subject. Such a doctrine carried out would subvert the very pillars of government. It would produce the worst kind of anarchy and misrule. It is, however, wisdom on the part of rulers in the enacting of laws, and as a matter of favor, to have regard to the consciences of their subjects, as far as is consistent with the great ends of government. It is upon this principle that the Quakers are exempted from bearing arms, and this duty is commuted to the payment of a certain sum of money. It is upon this principle that the individual who cannot conscientiously take the oath on the Bible, is allowed to take it by the uplifted hand. But this indulgence must not be carried too far. The Legislature of the state of New York, a few years since, enacted a law exempting the seventh day Baptists from legal process on Saturday. But they soon found it would not answer, and at the next session repealed it.

Here it may be inquired if the judgment and conscience of the government come in conflict with the judgment and conscience of the subject, what then is to be done? We answer—that if merely their judgments conflict upon matters which have nothing to do with the conscience, the subject is bound to submit in the direction of obedience. No matter how unwise he may consider a law, if it be not *wicked* he is bound to *obey* it. So in all cases where the subject is not clear in his own mind, that the thing required is wrong, we think the fact that the government com-

mands it, should decide him in favor of obedience. But where the conscience of the subject comes clearly in conflict with the enactments of government, neither should yield. Surely the government must not yield. Such a doctrine would be fraught with the most dreadful consequences. The government is bound to execute its laws, notwithstanding the conscience of the subject. Nor must the subject yield in the direction of obedience, but he is bound peaceably to submit to suffer the penalty.* This we believe to have been the doctrine and practice of Paul and the other Apostles: This we hold should be the doctrine and practice of all good citizens, and especially of the ministers of Christ.

The pulpit is a most powerful moral agency, and great care should be taken to give it a right direction. It requires a well balanced mind to maintain a *truly* conservative position. By which we mean, not a "*say nothing and do nothing*" position, but a position, which, under all the circumstances, will, to the greatest possible extent, *conserve the rights and privileges of all*. The people should be

* This *submitting to suffer the penalty* is not, as has been recently taught by an American Divine, *honoring the law*. He says, "If I cannot, with a good conscience, honor the law by obeying it, then will I honor it by suffering the penalty." A queer way this to honor the law. We can understand how government honors the law by *inflicting* the penalty, but we cannot understand how the culprit honors the law by *suffering* the penalty. Much less does that man honor the law, who suffers its penalty for *conscience' sake*, because he thinks the law so *base*, that he cannot obey it. Did Daniel, or "the three children," honor those laws which forbade the worship of the true God, and commanded the practice of idolatry, by refusing to obey them, and submitting to suffer the penalty? Did they not, by such a course, rather bear the most positive testimony against those laws? We are much mistaken, if, when "driven to the wall," the learned divine would not find it difficult to maintain his position.

taught submission to government. This duty cannot be too often or too powerfully inculcated; but they should also be taught that when human laws conflict with the Divine law, they are "to obey God rather than man." The true doctrine, under such circumstances, has been correctly stated to be, "*non-resistance to man, but obedience to God.*" * It is impossible to make good citizens by making bad christians. So, also, our rulers should be made to feel that they are God's ministers for good to those over whom they preside; that they have been ordained or appointed by him to be "a terror to evil doers and a praise to them that do well;" and that if they pervert the ends of justice, and oppress the subject, God holds them responsible, and will call them to an account. Things have come to a strange pass when ministers of the Gospel teach that governments, in matters belonging to them, are not amenable to God, and that the citizen owes *sole* allegiance to "the rulers of his people." When the pulpit speaks a language like this, it is no wonder that "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.'" How very different is the teaching of the Psalmist, who, with so much beauty and power, enjoins upon all rulers to "kiss the son (submit to his authority) lest he be angry, and they perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."

* An exceedingly able and eloquent sermon, by our much esteemed friend and brother Rev. S. T. Spear, of Brooklyn. It came to our table while we were writing on the same subject. We are charmed with its manner and matter. It is "*multum in parvo*" on the subject of the citizen's duty to his God and country.

The first impression of the careful reader, while perusing the sermon now under review, will be that of amazement, that a christian pastor should teach such sentiments. But after an examination so close and critical as to see mirrored in its pages the mental attributes of its author, his amazement will give place to a conviction that it is the legitimate effect of a corresponding cause. It is evidently the production of a mind, in its action fervid, rapid, and oftentimes erratic—a mind sufficiently capacious and ambitious to grapple with subjects of the greatest importance, but not sufficiently careful in the examination of its premises, and, alas! too hasty in leaping to its conclusions—a mind exceedingly brilliant, and in many respects fascinating, but which frequently pours from its ample storehouse, in a crude, undigested, and unqualified manner, the first impressions of thoughts which others have taken a lifetime to mature.

Judging from the production before us, we would not be surprised if in six months time our author should publish another sermon to show that the Deity, since his relinquishment of all civil authority to human governments, is so delighted with the leisure he enjoys, that he has concluded to retire entirely from the affairs of the universe, and to relinquish his ecclesiastical rule in favor of the Presbyterian General Assembly. But we will not attempt to pierce the future. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

We do not intend, in this review, to enter upon the Bible argument on the subject of slavery. To do this, would swell its pages beyond its designed limit. Nor is there any necessity that we should; for our author has

not done it. He has contented himself with bold and unqualified assertions, and we are not bound to conclude that his assertions, without proof, are any more convincing than our own. Besides, we are too well acquainted with the laws of controversy, and the advantages of our present position, to care to change positions with him. We are unwilling, by entering a field which, in this sermon, he has neglected to explore, to throw him upon the defensive. Should he think proper to publish an argument to show that the Bible upholds slavery, we are prepared then to meet him. We have carefully examined the subject, and believe we can show that the Old Testament no more sustains slavery than it does polygamy, or the offensive slaughter of nations; and that Christ and his disciples have, neither by their precept nor example, given the *least sanction* to any system of *chattelizing* human beings.

We never have been a technical abolitionist, but we have no sympathy with the fugitive slave bill. Even admitting that "the compromises of the constitution" rendered necessary some law upon the subject, and that the national legislature are the body to enact it, there was no necessity for *such* a law. Upon the supposition that slavery is lawful, several of the provisions of this bill do great violence to some of the plainest principles of natural justice. We do not design to examine it "in extenso," but will refer, in illustration of the truth of our statement, to that unprecedented provision in section eighth, by which the commissioner is to receive for his services ten dollars if he finds against the individual claimed as a fugitive, and only five dollars if he finds in his favor. Is it worth any more to the commissioner—does it cost him any more

trouble and expense, to decide against the supposed fugitive than to decide for him? * Or does the government, in this "land of the free," hold that a decision in favor of slavery is worth just twice as much as one in favor of liberty? If not, how else can we view this extra allowance than as a bribe against freedom? What would we think of a law which should offer the judge, who is trying a fellow-citizen for murder, twenty dollars for his services, provided he acquits him, but *forty* dollars if he convicts him? Could the extra allowance of twenty dollars be otherwise viewed than as a bribe offered by the government to the judge against the prisoner, and in favor of his conviction? How long would the people endure such a law? Surely no longer than until it could be *constitutionally* repealed. But it may be said, the two cases differ. We admit it. In the one case, the probabilities are in favor of the prisoner's being *white*, in the other, they are in favor of his being *black*. In the one case life, and in the other liberty, is put in jeopardy—and we will leave it for the reader to decide if he would not prefer DEATH to SLAVERY.

Much, however, as we are opposed to the fugitive slave bill, we would by no means sanction forcible resistance from any quarter—not even from the slave. But with this remark, we would also say, that in our opinion, there is a wide distinction, between the natural right of the pursued fugitive to resist, and the right of the citizen to advise him so to do, and that there is likewise, a marked differ-

* Should it be said that it is more trouble for the commissioner to make out a certificate of delivery than to record a decision of discharge, we answer, that the difference, if there be any, must be trifling; and no one will pretend that it is worth as much as the whole previous investigation.

ence between, the slave's right to resist, and the expediency of such a course. Forcible resistance from any source, would be ill-advised and exceedingly unwise — from the citizen it would be as criminal as unwise. Under a government like ours, a government of such chartered privileges, the press and the ballot-box are far better and more efficient weapons of reform, than the bayonet and the sword. In our Republic, the will of the people is omnipotent. If they desire the repeal or modification of this law it will be done. If they do not desire it, seriously to talk, or even to think of resistance, would be absurd.

We believe the days of slavery are numbered. The "peculiar institution" has become decrepit with age. The deep furrows upon its brow, are the unmistakable marks of a sure decay. The time is not far distant when it will be sepulchered for ever. Causes are in operation which must produce this result. It is our duty, as citizens, calmly, judiciously, decidedly, and perseveringly to do what we lawfully can to aid the operation of these causes. But we should be careful, not to outrun the Providence of God, nor should we allow Providence to outrun us. We should bear in mind that its ponderous wheel is surely revolving upon its axis. God holds it in his hand, and directs its movements with unerring wisdom. In its revolution, it most certainly will crush every system of slavery. If we do not see it, our children may. We sincerely pray that He who is not merely the Bishop of bishops, but also "the King of kings, and the Lord of lords," will, in infinite mercy, hasten the period :— "And let all the people say, AMEN."